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ABSTRACT

This digest features three articles on equal education for immigrant girls. The first, "Building Bridges between Cultures" (Julia L. Potter), highlights discussions with experts in the field of immigrant education, examining culture, family, and school; expectations for education; overcoming cultural barriers in education; parent involvement; and equitable education. The discussions address the fact that immigrant girls face the daily challenge of living in a new culture, and they may feel torn between their parents' culture and the mainstream culture. While immigrant girls tend to do better than immigrant boys, they face additional, gender-based obstacles. The second article, "Mentors Confirm and Enhance Girls' Lives" (Barbara Warren-Sams), discusses mentoring issues for girls, particularly girls of color and immigrant girls, explaining that the most effective programs are those that consider participants' needs beyond those shared by their gender. It notes the importance of considering the process of adjustment to a new culture and facilitating family involvement. The third article, "From Vietnam to the U.S." (Linda Pollack Shevitz and Susan Morris Shaffer), presents a contemporary view of U.S. history, offering stories reflecting the personal experiences of Vietnamese girls and women who immigrated in the 1970s and 1980s. (SM)

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WEEA Equity Resource Center

Digest

Education & Immigrant Girls

Building Bridges between Cultures

Edited by Julia L. Potter, WEEA Equity Resource Center at EDC

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Digest

Education & Immigrant Girls

Building Bridges between Cultures

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Across the country there are many individuals and families who have recently arrived from their homelands to establish new homes and communities in the United States. Immigrants come from all over the globe, from different cultures and religions, and speak a wide variety of languages. Although most immigrants are seeking to better their circumstances for themselves and their children, they relocate for a variety of reasons. Some come because they expect to establish a permanent home and community here, some move to escape disaster or persecution in their country of origin, some are here because tragically they were forced from their country, some join family members who preceded them in their journey to the U.S., sometimes they come for education or employment opportunities, some may come to escape extreme poverty and to send necessary resources back home to family members, and still others come for different reasons.

The varied reasons people immigrate profoundly affect their possibilities and experiences in the United States. Regardless of the reasons for immigration, however, newcomers strive to succeed in their new home, and for children this most often means seeking an excellent education. Whether they have moved with their families or been sent by them, boys and girls, young women and young men carry the often heavy responsibility to be the "ones who succeed" here.

Immigrant girls face a number of challenges around culture, race, class, gender, and language in their new community. In addition to discrimination that they may or may not have experienced in their home country, they face a new set of expectations in their schooling, often competing demands for competency, allegiance to two cultures, and increased responsibilities to family and community. Given the variety of backgrounds from which immigrant girls come, the issues they face are also varied. Some are shared, while others are particular to each girl's culture, and of course to her individual family circumstance and her own unique personal experiences. When we decided to address the topic of educational equity for immigrant girls, we wanted to acknowledge this variety and also the fact that, like any group generalization, not all issues pertain to all immigrant girls. While this digest touches on the breadth of the challenges and successes that immigrant girls encounter in pursuing education in the U.S., we hope that this begins deeper discussion on many levels.

The WEEA Equity Resource Center at EDC conducted an online interview and discussion with several experts working in the field of education regarding immigrants. The participants hail from a number of different locations and venues, and work with diverse populations. We discussed equity in education for immigrant girls. The outcome of the discussion follows.

Culture, Family, and School

For the majority of immigrant girls, there is a great difference between home and school culture. Meeting expectations and maintaining peaceful family relations while also excelling in school and building friendships with classmates can be a difficult challenge. Cultural and family expectations for immigrant girls may differ widely from what is expected by the school. The discussion participants address these expectations with the following comments:

"Immigrant parents and their children are very aware of the importance of schooling and education and its place in their pursuit of a better tomorrow. We asked immigrant parents: 'How do you get ahead in the U.S.?' A reference to education was by far the most frequent response. A Dominican parent noted that the way to get ahead was by 'studying, learning English, going to col-

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lege, and becoming a professional.' A Chinese parent eloquently told us: 'The only way to do it is to do well in school. . . . Knowledge is the most lasting thing. If you have an education you can have a more fulfilling life and nothing can defeat you.' The parents' attitudes towards education are transferred to their children. The children of immigrants arrive in our schools with extremely positive attitudes towards teachers and other school authorities."[1]

The children of immigrants arrive in our schools with extremely positive attitudes towards teachers and other school authorities.

—Carola Sudrez-Orozco, co-director of the Harvard Immigration Project and Senior Research Associate & Lecturer in Human Development and Psychology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

**"*There are definite differences between Latino* home culture and school culture, and they often collide with each other. Many Latino students find themselves torn between loyalty to family and community (cooperation and sharing) and a system that focuses on individuality, personal/private ownership (accumulation of wealth and goods), and competition. Many Latino cultures see intelligence and academic ability as a gift from God to be valued, cherished, and shared with others. It is not to be flaunted publicly, and to be individually and openly proud is not viewed kindly but frowned upon.

"Conversely, our school systems focus on public displays of intelligence and/or achievement through various public recognitions, rewards, and/or awards. They teach children to be individualistically proud of their academic achievements. They teach that only those who achieve—the individual—deserve the rewards, whereas many Latino cultures feel that the community deserves the rewards because the more fortunate should share with and help others. Many Latino cultures see public displays of self-acclamation as false and sinful. Children who possess a gift from God are taught to be humble rather than self-aggrandizing. They are taught to help others less fortunate than themselves instead of competing against them and/or making the less fortunate feel even lower.

"U.S. mainstream culture exalts youth, whereas many Latino cultures hold the elderly in high regard. In the U.S. young Latinos find that society centers around young people, with little regard for the elderly. Indeed, mainstream culture devalues the elderly and does not provide for their welfare adequately. Latino students want to fit in and integrate themselves into mainstream culture as much as possible, and are thus placed at odds with their parents, grandparents, and the Latino community values. In their adopted culture, they are taught to reject aging and to try to stay as young as possible for as long as possible. In contrast, in Latino cultures aging is often perceived as an honorable and natural process that should bring wisdom and recognition as well as the support of others.

"Furthermore, because Latino youth often become more skilled in the English language than their parents and other elderly members of the culture, they are placed in a position of authority and/or superiority over them. Neither the culture nor the families and communities are prepared to handle this reversal of roles and authority. Whereas U.S. mainstream culture socializes children to become independent and exert their own authority, Latino cultures expect their children to remain deferential—courteous, honoring, respectful—and closely linked to the parents, families, and communities. Latino youth's desire to become like mainstream children is often perceived as disrespectful and dishonoring.

"Children who learn English at the expense of their Spanish language skills become isolated from their cultural links. Unable to communicate with their parents and the elder members of the family, they lose touch with the cultural heritage and strength needed to sustain the racist assaults to their identity and integrity they encounter in the mainstream."

—Marta I. Cruz-Janzen, Associate Professor of Multicultural Education at the Florida Atlantic University College of Education

**"*I work with youth who are refugees from the* former Soviet Union—evangelical Christians who have known religious persecution. Every day when these Slavic students go home from school, they cross a culture border. There are some differences in their lives that separate them from so-called average Americans. For example, extended family members often live in the student's home and/or are readily available to act in place of the nuclear family. Roles of family members are hierarchical and traditional, following a paternal structure. More subservience is expected in this structure, passivity in children is encouraged much more than in most other American households, and interdependence is stressed over independence.

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"I once developed a handout to contrast my community's cultural styles with the mainstream American value set. Of course it relies on generalizations, but it also highlights some patterns that are useful to notice, for example:

- A lifelong attachment to family and community is expected, versus separation in young adulthood to pursue own life
- Separation of men's and women's roles is intended by nature versus the pursuit of shared roles and gender equality
- Parental authority, wisdom, and guidance of children's actions versus a youth's self-determination and independent plans for the future
- Work and school are serious, play is separate versus the notion that a person can have fun while working or learning

"Along with some of these attitude differences there are lifestyle differences. Foods common in Russian-speaking households are typically not found on the American table, or are prepared differently. Decor chosen for the home is specific and recognizable to visitors.

"The families we work with have many children—eight is not an unusual number, in contrast to the typical American family of two or three children. Organizing a large family requires different strategies from managing a small one. Every member generally has jobs and specific roles that they must play; in these families interdependence and family loyalty are primary values.

"A very active religious life, centered on the church (several services a week, choir, youth groups, camps, etc.) is the norm for this group. Since faith occupies a central place in their lives, activities such as team sports, clubs, and volunteering are rarely encountered in this community. In fact, 'volunteerism' as such is an alien concept because helping family, friends, and community is so interwoven into life's fabric that people don't think about adding strangers into the equation. These and countless other differences make life a border crossing for youth."

—Anne Valsamakis, Program Coordinator at the International Refugee Center of Oregon (IRCO), Slavic Youth Services

"As a classroom teacher 'living' with students from day to day, I find that I am in an interesting position to observe and understand what is going on in the lives of the young immigrant teens I teach. These kind of observations and conclusions are different from those drawn from research studies. However, I believe teacher observation is valuable and can help to inform the work that others do with immigrant youth. From my daily work with my students I am currently thinking about the ways that cultural constraints on immigrant girls' freedom may actually keep them from being pulled into some of the very negative aspects of 'Americanization.'

"Both girl and boy students in my classes talk explicitly about the differences in freedom granted boys and girls: boys can go hang out but girls cannot. Boys can go out without family members, girls can't. Boys have less familial responsibilities than girls. Ironically I see more of my male students trying to 'fit in' to what they see as American teen culture by adopting the clothing, attitude, and swagger that is popularized by the media. They interpret the 'freedom' here often in the most negative of ways, to mean 'do anything and don't worry about consequences.' Many of my female students are preparing for college and are focused on the future. The girls are focused on their own future rather than a future defined by imminent marriage and children; those will come later they say. Groups of girls find each other, spend time together in school, and encourage each other to go after their goals. Many of these focused girls still have familial responsibilities and part time jobs."

—Emily Hewitt, ESL Teacher, Madison Park Technical Vocational High School in Boston

When the youth I work with (refugees from the former Soviet Union with backgrounds of religious persecution) go home from school, they cross a culture border every day.

Expectations for Education

"Grades are expected to be good—education has always had a high status in the former USSR. The girls we work with tend to be much more successful here academically than their male peers. However, with every passing year that brings a girl closer to her 18th birthday, the pressure to find a mate accelerates. The messages she gets direct her to homemaking and child rearing. Most girls are not seriously encouraged to aim high, because such ambitions might interfere with marriage and traditional expectations.

"Slavic girls do not want to stand out and be noticed or considered assertive in any way. Therefore, their class participation is often passive. Anything that is different from the group is threatening, and girls have been taught to keep a low profile. Other girls from their peer group judge them

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strongly if they step outside norms, whether in dress, actions, or other ways.

"The poorer or less educated Slavic refugee families often don't push a girl to graduate but prefer her to enter the workforce as soon as possible. Many girls I know rush to end high school early so that they can go through a short certificate program (such as a medical or dental assistant program) prior to marrying. Often girls don't consider college, or they do so with the understanding that a husband and family will take precedence over other ambitions."

—Anne Valsamakis

Many Latino cultures see formal education as only part of a well-rounded education.

"***Although most Latino parents want their children*** to have more education than they did, they do not want their children to become 'better' than them. In other words, they don't want to be perceived as lesser human beings. This is a hard concept to understand by those not in the culture. In many ways U.S. mainstream culture teaches that with academic and economic achievement people become 'superior' to others with less. Latinos see this through the disdain with which many mainstream members, particularly those with education and wealth, treat those they consider inferior and subhuman. The poor become maids, gardeners, and nannies—never to sit together with those they serve as equals at the dinner table. For many Latinos, to become 'better' in education and economic status does not and should not elevate the person above the human rank of others less fortunate. This is a difficult dilemma for many Latino groups because the mainstream culture teaches their children that to become 'better' educationally and economically usually means distancing themselves from their families and cultures, for example to pursue higher education or to accept a job in another city. They feel as if their children become ashamed of them.

"Some Latino families see formal mainstream education as a loss to the community rather than a gain because as their children become more formally educated they are forced to take jobs outside and often away from their communities. This is seen as a loss of family resources. Further, children are often taught that their own home cultures and languages are inferior, to be shunned. These educated children are lost as role models and as part of the support system for the family and community. They are not available to contribute as they move away and often do not visit regularly.

"Mainstream culture focuses on the formal education of children as the sole cultural priority. Many Latino cultures see formal education as only part of a well-rounded education. Indeed, formal education is often perceived as secondary to a humanistic education that centers on honor, respect, and integrity. To be formally educated does not mean to be 'educated.' Formal education means 'letrado,' or a person of letters who reads, writes, and speaks well. Formal education may not be perceived as required since any person can self-educate, become 'letrado,' and be equally admired and respected. Humanistic education means 'educado,' which means to have integrity, honor, and respect. This creates a conflict because mainstream teachers want families to focus their children on formal education and not on the humanistic education, negating learning they receive in the home, family, and community.

"Latino children, especially females, are expected to help the family by performing chores and taking care of others, usually family elders and/or younger siblings. Children are often expected to do their chores before they do their school homework or to do both tasks simultaneously. The Latino culture sets family as the priority; children are not expected to concentrate on schoolwork only. This often creates conflicts for females, especially those in higher education. Latinas are expected to remain contributing family members and come home from college on weekends."

—Marta I. Cruz-Janzen

"***As an academic teacher (ESL) I try to create ways*** to open dialogue with the young men and young women in my classes. In our ESL class we have watched and analyzed the movie *Love and Basketball*, a wonderful tool to help young people analyze choices and gender roles. In our discussions the girls were very vocal about how girls have the right to choose what they want. These girls are from Cape Verde, Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Brazil and have been in the U.S. varying amounts of time—from eight months to three years. I see cultural influences and a generational influence at work in our discussions. Immigrant girls in my classes are talking the language of goals, achievement, and choice with much greater fluency than I did at their age. It makes me feel hopeful for them and for our society.

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Building Bridges . . . continued

"However they also voiced how many times parental figures discourage their dreams and point them down the 'girls" path. I believe this is a generational as well as a cultural point of conflict. As many discussion participants have pointed out it helps no one to put young people into 'cultural boxes.' The more I teach the more I realize the importance of responding to the individuals in front of me. However, I do not want to minimize the importance of cultural knowledge as an undercurrent for understanding the dynamic of the student-teacher relationship."

—Emily Hewitt

Overcoming Barriers

Many teachers and administrators have worked hard to bridge cultural differences in classrooms, to remove barriers for immigrant students, and to promote understanding between the varied experiences of their students. One of the changes made in U.S. education to meet the needs of a diverse student body has been to provide English as a Second Language/English Language Learners (ESL/ELL) classes for students new to the language. In addition, some schools provide bilingual education classes, both assisting the transition to a new education system and demonstrating that language acquisition and fluency does not reflect content knowledge for immigrant students.

To honor heritage, and raise awareness and understanding of traditions and history, many schools celebrate nationally recognized months such as African American History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month, and Asian Heritage Month. Many teachers also incorporate cultural lessons into the curriculum. Teachers and administrators use different approaches to meet the needs of students who come from varying backgrounds and speak a variety of languages at home. Following are some observations about barriers and suggestions from our discussion participants for making the diverse classroom work.

"In addition to all the usual barriers to education that many immigrant students face regardless of gender, the primary barriers for girls are:

- Significant obligations at home that distract them from their academic tasks or interfere with attendance.
- Shyness may be misinterpreted by American teachers who value 'assertive' behavior.
- The unwillingness of many immigrant families to allow their daughters to venture far from home in pursuit of a college education.
- Cultural norms and family expectations emphasizing marriage and children in their daughters' teens or early twenties.

In exploring the issue of culture in the classroom, three significant matters should be kept in mind. First is the issue of culturally and linguistically meaningful materials. If a child cannot understand, she will not be able to identify with and emotionally invest in a given topic; in such circumstances, meaningful learning cannot occur. Efforts to make curricular materials relevant to the social and cultural experiences of children engage interest and generate enthusiasm.

"A related theme is the issue of the discontinuities immigrant children experience as they move from the classrooms in the country of origin to their new American classrooms. Beyond the obvious linguistic and curricular differences, children must learn to navigate in classrooms that are dominated by different cultural styles. Many immigrant children are used to classrooms that are highly structured and that require cognitive and interpersonal practices that are quite different from what is expected in the typical American classroom.

"Classrooms in the U.S. are dominated, however superficially, by an ethos of egalitarianism and democracy. The immigrant child may initially come to experience the new social pace and structure as disorienting and confusing. In some classrooms, students are expected to address their teachers by their first name, a practice that many immigrant children and parents find incomprehensible. Cultural miscommunication easily ensues."[2]

—Carola Suárez-Orozco

"In the classroom:

- Recognize that immigrant students feel lonely and isolated. Integrate them into as many classroom and school activities as possible. Before assigning them to a 'buddy' find out as much as possible about the student's country of origin, the reasons for migration, and the sociopolitical conditions back home. We must be careful not to confuse voluntary and involuntary immigration, or to team students with someone who is an 'enemy' back home. Some students and their families may be political and/or economic refugees.

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Immigrant girls in my classes are talking the language of goals, achievement, and choice with much greater fluency than I did at their age. It makes me feel hopeful for them and for our society.

Building Bridges . . . continued

- Find out whether the family expects to remain in the U.S. or whether they expect to return 'home' someday. If they expect to return we can anticipate that they will maintain language and cultural traditions.
- Do not assume that the children and their families are eager and ready to become assimilated into mainstream culture and shed their language and heritage. Indeed, it is good to support their culture as this serves as strength to overcome the anxieties and obstacles they are certain to encounter.
- Meet with the student's parents. Privately ask them to share as much as they can about their child and their reasons for migrating in order to support your work with their child.
- Find out the family aspirations for their children, especially for the boys versus the girls.
- Understand the reasons for migration. This will help us identify ways to support the child and the family. The entire family may be traumatized by the conditions that forced them to flee their country.
- Work to ease the child's anxieties about being in a new environment and not having English language skills. In the classroom use TPR (Total Physical Response)[3] and audiovisual aids to enhance understanding. These are effective teaching practices in classrooms in general.
- Use instructional strategies that integrate diverse learning styles and forms of intelligences. Minimize lectures, become adept at working in collaborative settings, and utilize various modes of instruction.
- Have all students share information about their own backgrounds—their heritage and place of origin—including students who have lived in the U.S. all their lives. We definitively do not want to focus all attention on the immigrant student. If we ask immigrant children to share their backgrounds, etc., we are making them 'oddities.' We become the norm and they are the ones who need to explain themselves, be examined, and be understood. Conversely, we negate the heritage of European American children.
- Secure instructional and communication support for the student and even the family. Ensure that students are receiving a complete education in all subject areas. Do not focus on English language acquisition and development. Do not place children's education on hold until they master English.

Finally, do not tell parents to completely stop speaking their native language at home with their child. The parents are probably not fluent and literate in the English language. In their struggle to speak English with their child they are unable to support higher cognitive and language development."

—Marta I. Cruz-Janzen

We have found a general belief among many immigrant parents that teachers are responsible for what goes on in school.

Parent Involvement

"***Immigrant parents arrive with very different cultural*** models and expectations than those found among mainstream American parents. There are important cultural differences between groups; indeed the expectations of Haitian parents are quite different from those of Chinese parents. Nevertheless, there is a common denominator in the general attitudes and expectations among a broad range of immigrant parents. First, many immigrant parents believe that it is not their business to micromanage the schooling of their children. We have found a general belief among many immigrant parents that teachers are responsible for what goes on in school. This is true among both high status and low status immigrant parents. Many parents note it would, in fact, be presumptuous for them to second guess teachers' decisions and behaviors. Second, these beliefs tend to be compounded by the fact that immigrants, as social outsiders, feel less secure about questioning the judgement of school authorities. This is especially true for parents who have themselves had little formal schooling and are thus less savvy about the general principles of the culture of 'going to school.'"[4]

—Carola Suárez-Orozco

"***One of the barriers preventing parents from be***coming more involved in their children's school is lack of understanding of the term 'parent involvement.' Schools often leave participation entirely up to parents, who may not know what their options are and feel awkward finding out. In addition, parents may respond best to specific requests, such as 'Can you bring crackers and cheese to the meeting? Please come for two hours to organize books,' etc.

"For immigrant and refugee parents, who are typically focused on struggling with day-to-day

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survival issues, ambiguity is a deterrent that makes it too difficult for them even to begin to connect with the school. Though many parents are eager to help their children succeed in school, they really don't know where one enters or begins a relationship with the school and teachers. In addition they don't know what type of contribution is meaningful.

"Another contributing factor is that parents who lack English skills often feel stupid, and inferior to their children. Parents are also not familiar with the social codes and rules. They don't know how to play the role that is expected of them, and therefore they end up being passive rather than involved in their child's school.

"Parental involvement needs to be a two-way street. Connections between schools and parents need to be made in a personal manner. Educators need to get to know the students' family members as individuals. Schools need to make one-on-one connections, be a resource for parents, and help them find their voice.

"For example, family ESL classes are a way to bring parents, teachers, and children together to share and enjoy learning. These classes provide the opportunity for parents and children to work together with teachers; everyone gives and receives something of value. Opportunities for involvement can more easily evolve out of this type of program.

"Educators need to pay more attention to access. Immigrant students don't feel they have access to the keys to success. They don't know the rules of the game. Ambassadors or mentors can show new students where the doors are and how to unlock them. Immigrant and refugee children need to be introduced to the education system and treated with dignity. They need adults in their lives who can affirm that they are just as able and just as likely to get the 'goodies' in life as anyone else.

"An example of an opportunity using this type of ambassadorship is an annual conference for Russian-speaking youth held in Portland. Youth and adults plan the bilingual event together, inviting successful role models from the community to share valuable information on how they 'made it.' This conference helps foster relations between adults and youth and provides the type of guidance needed to instill a vision of possibilities and hope for the future."

—Anne Valsamakis

"*I have found that when working with Latinas,* parents must often be educated and/or 'recruited' along with the student. Typically college recruiters go to the schools and give presentations and materials to the students. This isn't effective for recruiting Latinas because they especially need the understanding and support of their parents. I work through community centers, churches, and other community key players to educate ('recruit') the parents about the importance of formal education, and particularly college. I explain to the parents how higher education for their children, particularly daughters, will be an asset to the entire family.

"Often, I find myself counseling college students' parents who expect their children, especially their daughters, to come home on the weekend to complete their chores and/or help with the family business. We work out alternate schedules and identify other family members who can take on the added responsibilities with minimal interruption to the family. I point out that an educated child, daughter or son, can serve as a great role model for younger siblings as well as for the entire community.

"Often parents of Latinas will not let them move away from home, even in-state. Those students can be encouraged and supported in attending local commuter colleges. Latino parents also become concerned that their educated daughters will follow a career and postpone marriage and family. Indeed, they fear that grandchildren will never come. They need help to understand that educating their daughters may delay the arrival of grandchildren, it does not mean that grandchildren will not come eventually.

"Another fear is that educated daughters will marry out of the culture to raise children who do not identify with them and their culture and/or do not speak the language. Although teachers and counselors cannot make guarantees, providing support and reassurance is helpful."

—Marta I. Cruz-Janzen

Often, I find myself counseling college students' parents who expect their children, especially their daughters, to come home on the weekend to complete their chores and/or help with the family business.

Equitable Education

We have mentioned several of the issues that impact education for immigrant girls. But how are immigrant girls faring in terms of equity in education? Are there differences in grades and class participation between girls and boys? Parental and cultural expectations for immigrant girls may differ from what is expected of their brothers, but

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data suggests that academically immigrant girls are performing well and have high aspirations for continued education.

"When an immigrant child finally sits at her desk in her new classroom a world of possibilities can potentially open. In some classrooms, immigrant children will flourish. During the course of our fieldwork, we have observed classrooms where teachers constructively engage their students' energies, optimism, and willingness to work hard. Children in these classrooms are surrounded by peers who recognize and support the crucial role of school in their future well-being. They are exposed to meaningful curriculum and have access to instructional technologies and other up-to-date classroom materials.

"In other cases, we have found classrooms where teachers are resentful and feel burdened by their new charges, convey pessimism about the immigrant students' abilities to learn, and fail to engage them. In such classrooms, immigrant children come in contact with many peers who have given up on school and are regularly disruptive.

Because most immigrant children arrive to the classroom with very limited English skills, cognitive competencies may be masked.

"Perhaps the most important challenge that takes place within the classroom is facilitating the child's ability to build upon the cognitive skills and habits she brings with her to the new setting. Because most immigrant children arrive to the classroom with very limited English skills, cognitive competencies may be masked. While the student may be able to work at fairly advanced levels in her native language, her inability to speak English will make it difficult for her to cover the same materials in the new language. Many immigrant children in our study report feeling frustrated that they are now going over materials they had mastered in their native language long ago.[4]

"Nationally, current research shows that in many ways immigrant girls are doing better than immigrant boys are in terms of educational attainment. This pattern has been true in previous waves of immigration as well."

—Carola Suárez-Orozco

"In my classes the young girls are the ones who are achieving. This has been an issue for me all along in doing gender equity work in the schools—a concept that many seem to interpret as 'girl-focused' work. I have been concerned about the lack of achievement among many of the immigrant teenage males that are in my classes. I have also seen many young women with familial responsibilities and have been impressed with the way they balance these responsibilities with schoolwork.

"However, 'shyness' among immigrant girls is a gender-specific barrier in classroom interactions. I have many girls who sit politely in class, pay attention, do well on tests, and say *not one word* in class discussions. As a teacher I struggle with what I see as passivity among some of my female students from Brazil, Haiti, Cape Verde, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. The feminist in me who values the democratic ideals of speaking one's mind encourages their participation in class. I want to encourage their 'voices.' Perhaps my attitude creates a barrier because at times I interpret their shyness or passivity as willful resistance to important class interaction and dialogue. While for some students willfulness may be involved, for others their cultural influences prevail.

"Recently I was talking with several young Cape Verdean and Dominican women—all high achievers who are ready for college. Few of them want to go out of Boston for school and some of them get nervous thinking about going outside of known neighborhoods. They also are not eager to go off to college to live in a dorm, even though a scholarship makes it economically feasible. Whereas most American students would jump at the chance to leave home, many of the young women I have worked with have gone to colleges where they can commute from home. Is this necessarily a barrier? I think only if a young woman is choosing this option over another program that gives her a superior academic challenge or a field of study she prefers."

—Emily Hewitt

"For immigrant girls to get equitable education:

- See girls within their cultural/famih ial context and try to work within that value system while not losing track of your own goals.
- Try to embody equity and strength, be truthful, and be there for girls. If your own education and experiences have "empowered" you, strengthened you, freed you, and helped you to become confident, eventually girls who have the chance to know you might grow past some of their limits."

—Anne Valsamakis

Conclusion

In considering the issues for immigrant girls in the U.S. as they pursue education we have dis-

Continued p. 10, "Building Bridges"

WEEA Resources ... *continued from back cover*

A Road Well Traveled
Three Generations of Cuban American Women

A first of its kind, this anthology gives voice to a diverse group of Cuban American women living in various parts of the United States. Twelve Cuban women discuss their experiences, economic backgrounds, and educational and professional achievements. An important addition to social studies, and women's and Latino studies. (162 pp.) • By Terry Doran, Janet Satterfield, and Chris Stade, Latin American Educational Center 1988 #2683 • $21.00

ESL: The Whole Person Approach

For K–12 bilingual education teachers. An innovative approach that introduces a holistic, humanistic method of bilingual education. Fully integrates bilingual education with gender equity concepts to improve Latino/a students' English proficiency and remove gender bias from multicultural curricula. (145 pp.) • By Cynthia Ramsey and Trinidad Lopez, National Institute for Multicultural Education 1989 #2699 • $18.50

Women's Journeys, Women's Stories
In Search of Our Multicultural Future

This exciting middle and high school women's history curriculum picks up where other history texts leave off. Presents a contemporary multicultural view, telling stories that fill critical gaps in our nation's history, including information on immigrant women, and moves women and their experience into every classroom. (Teacher 130 pp.; Student 308 pp.) • By Linda Shevitz, Maryland State Department of Education; Susan Shaffer, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium. 1997 #2805 • (Set of *Teacher Guide* and *Student Manual*) $40.00

Gender Equity for Educators, Parents, and Community *or* La igualdad de género para educadores, padres y la comunidad

Available in both English and Spanish, this booklet illustrates gender stereotypes and their relationship to students' success. (32 pp.) • By Pat Boland, WEEA Equity Resource Center 1995 #2800 (Spanish) • $5.00 #2762 (English) • $5.00

To order WEEA materials call our distribution center at 800-793-5076.

Additional Resources

Children of Immigration

Children of immigrants make up one-fifth of America's youth population. This book, written by the co-directors of the largest ongoing longitudinal study of immigrant children and their families, offers a clear, broad, interdisciplinary view of who these children are and what their futures might hold. (224 pp.) • By Carola Suárez-Orozco and Marcelo Suárez-Orozco (2001) • Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA • ISBN 0-674-00492-2

Children and Languages at School
Theory into Practice

This journal contains essays by a number of authors on such important topics as learning English and American culture, the loss of family languages, barriers for English-language learners, and bilingualism. • Edited by Lois Meyer (Autumn 2000, Vol. 39, No. 4.) • Theory into Practice, 172 Arps Hall, 1945 N. High Street, Columbus, OH 43210; 614-292-3407 or 888-678-3382 ext. 2-3407; **www.coe.ohio-state.edu/TIP/tip_home.htm**

The Inner World of the Immigrant Child

As students acculturate to their new circumstance in the U.S., they often conceal and suppress their inner world. This book, written from the perspective of a former immigrant child and a teacher who works with students in the classroom today, discusses ways to communicate and understand the turmoil of the recent newcomer student who is learning language, culture, and school topics simultaneously. By Cristina Igoa (1995) • Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 10 Industrial Avenue, Mahwah, NJ 07430-2262; 800-9-BOOKS-9; **www.erlbaum.com** • ISBN 0805880135

Other People's Children
Cultural Conflict in the Classroom

This award-winning book comprises three sections: Controversies Revisited, Lessons from Home and Abroad, and Looking to the Future. It offers an analysis of what is going on in America's diverse classrooms today and confronts the issues of culture, power, and communication. • By Lisa Delpit (1995) • The New Press, New York, NY • ISBN 1-56584-180-8

Slavic Girls
Daughters of Russian-Speaking Refugees

This ethnographic study of Russian-speaking girls and their families who have immigrated to Oregon since 1988 offers suggestions to those who work with Russian-speaking girls. • By Anne Valsamakis (1999) • International Refugee Center of Oregon (IRCO), Asian Family Center, 4424 N.E. Glisan Street, Portland, OR 97213; 503-235-9396

Sociological Foundations Supporting the Study of Cultural Diversity

This report discusses the barriers to educational equity encountered by young people from low-income families and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It recommends how to implement changes from the perspective of the teacher, who ultimately must effect change. • By Hugh Mehan (1991) • National Center for Research on Cultural Diversity and Second Language Learning, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1118 22nd Street NW, Washington, DC 20037; 202-362-0700; **www.cal.org**

Use the provided contact information to order these materials.

Building Bridges . . . continued

See girls within their cultural/familial context and try to work within that value system—while not losing track of your own goals.

cussed a number of topics, from culture, to expectations, to language, to equity. While students may have immigrated from different countries, and have many different needs and experiences, they share one certain commonality. Immigrant students face the daily challenge of living in a new culture. Sometimes, if not often, girls may feel torn between maintaining the culture of their parents and the mainstream culture, and work to find a place that bridges the two.

We have recognized that immigrant girls have distinct needs in terms of educational and social supports. In some respects they do as well or better than their male peers, in others they face additional challenges and obstacles based on their gender. Many of the ways we can support girls will also be helpful for immigrant boys. For example, schools can work to gain the support of families and communities, educate the school community as a whole about diverse cultures, and hold high expectations of all students.

Finally, we give many thanks to the participants of the dialogue. We appreciate their thoughtful contributions and hope that their observations have been helpful. For additional resources on educational equity, please visit the WEEA Equity Resource Center's website (www.edc.org/WomensEquity). ✦

Notes

1. C. Suárez-Orozco and M. Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001).
2. Ibid.
3. Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language learning method based on the coordination of speech and action. For more information on TPR, see the following websites: www.tpr-world.com and www.sil.org/lingualinks/languagelearning/WaysToApproachLanguageLearning/TotalPhysicalResponse.htm
4. C. Suárez-Orozco and M. Suárez-Orozco, *Children of Immigration.*

Biographies

Marta I. Cruz-Janzen, Ph.D., is associate professor of multicultural education at the Florida Atlantic University College of Education. Her dissertation, *Curriculum and the Self-concept of Biethnic and Biracial Persons*, explored the role of the home, community, school, and peers on the identity development of persons of color who are also biethnic and/or biracial. It received the 1997 University of Denver Phi Delta Kappa Dissertation of the Year Award. From 1997 through spring 2000, Ms. Cruz-Janzen was with the Metropolitan State College of Denver Department of Secondary Education. She received an M.A. and M.Ed. from Columbia University Teachers College with a focus on human development. Ms. Cruz-Janzen has recently relocated to Florida. Her prior work has centered on persons of color, particularly Black/African Americans and Latinos/Hispanics. Much of her work deals with Latinos who—like herself—are of biracial parentage, and, significantly, are of apparent African ancestry (Latinegros), and includes increasing understanding of factors that differentially affect males and females within Latino cultures both in Latin America and the United States.

Emily Hewitt is an ESL teacher at Madison Park Technical Vocational High School in Boston. For two years she has been a member of the Gender Healthy Schools team at Madison, a project funded by the Caroline and Sigmund Schott Foundation to explore issues of gender equity through a cultural lens. Through this grant Ms. Hewitt and her colleague Adelina da Silva publish Dream Writers, a newsletter of student work that reflects some of this exploration. She has also worked with Urban Improv, a local improvisational theatre group, to examine these issues. She has an M.A. Bilingual/ESL Studies from UMass Boston. Ms. Hewitt has taught immigrant teens for seven years in Boston. Prior to that she taught adult immigrants in a community-based adult learning program. In the late 1970s she worked at Casa Myrna Vazquez, a bilingual shelter for battered women and their children. At Madison Park Technical Vocational High School she teaches young people from Cape Verde, Brazil, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Central America, Haiti, and Vietnam.

Carola Suárez-Orozco is the co-director of the Harvard Immigration Project. She is also a senior research associate & lecturer in human development and psychology at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. She co-authored *Children of Immigration* (2001, Harvard University Press), and *Transformations: Migration, Family Life, and Achievement Motivation Among Latino Adolescents* (1995, Stanford University Press) with Marcelo Suárez-Orozco. They are also the co-editors (with Desiree Qin-Hillard) of the forthcoming six-volume series, *The New Immigration*, for Garland Press. The Harvard Immigration Project is following a group of 400 immigrant children from Haiti, China, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Central America longitudinally for five years to learn how the students adapt to American schools. Research involves interviewing children, their parents, and their teachers. The project also does ethnographic observations of children in 20 different schools in the Boston and San Francisco areas.

Anne, or Anya, Valsamakis is currently program coordinator at the International Refugee Center of Oregon-IRCO. She earned her MSW in planning administration and management from Portland State University. Her work at IRCO involves running the Slavic youth programs, which consist of services for at-risk students and a girls' program called Katusha. Katusha is a bilingual, bicultural small group model developed from a study completed in 1999 called "Slavic Girls: Daughters of Russian Speaking Refugees." It investigates the needs of young women from Oregon's evangelical Christian refugee community. This group, which numbers approximately 60,000 Russians and Ukrainians, began arriving in the late 1980s. Ms. Valsamakis also co-authored a gender and culture-specific curriculum for use in the Katusha program. In her capacity as IRCO program coordinator she writes grants, maintains and develops services for eastern European families, and pursues her research interest in issues of identity formation for teens from immigrant families.

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Mentors Confirm and Enhance Girls' Lives

By Barbara Warren-Sams, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Equity Center

This article is an expanded version of one that first appeared in the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory's National Mentoring Center Bulletin, *Winter 2000. It discusses mentoring issues for girls in general as well as girls of color and immigrant girls. We invite you to consider the themes and recommendations raised here as they apply to different populations of immigrant girls. Used with permission.*

Mentoring uses a relationship-based approach to building a girl's sense of personal efficacy and community connection under the guidance of an unrelated adult or adults, and more recently peer mentors. Mentoring programs can provide enormous benefits to all girls. However, "one-size-fits-all" programs for girls are less effective than programs that take into account participants' needs beyond those shared by their gender. Although girls share many needs and proclivities that differ from boys, lumping girls into a general category can hide the experiences of girls of diverse races, ethnic and cultural groups, and backgrounds.

Programs need to consider several questions to meet each girl's needs. To what racial or cultural group does she belong? Does she speak a native language other than English? Is the girl from a poor or middle-class family? Has her family recently immigrated to the U.S.? Does she have a disability? These factors influence how girls interact with others, not only within their own communities but also within the larger society.

Common Ground

In Harvard's "Understanding Adolescence" study, Amy Sullivan suggests that most girls may not desire or seek out what has been referred to as the "classical" or "male" model of the mentoring relationship. This model features a one-on-one relationship between an experienced adult and younger person, in which the mentor seeks to develop the character and competence of the younger person. In this model, the mentor instructs and guides the mentee by demonstrating personal, social, and job skills, and by challenging and encouraging him or her. The kind of mentoring that focuses on teaching, socializing, and role modeling is not "appropriate or sufficient for women in relationships with adolescent girls," Sullivan suggests. Instead, a two-way relationship appears to be more effective. The study found that in general girls especially could benefit from a mentor who

- gives advice, not lectures
- fosters a therapeutic relationship that provides a safe space for speaking one's mind and empowers girls to stop abuse if it is occurring
- acts as a partner
- allows girls to voice their concerns about social issues, prejudice, and discrimination (modeled in the relationship of "other-mother" for African American women)
- is flexible as she becomes aware of what's helpful and what's harmful
- listens to and validates what young women think and feel; shares adult experiences

Recently mentoring young women in groups has become popular. Practitioners understand that females greatly value relationships, and many cultures place importance on group affiliation. Group and team (or couple) mentoring embodies the significance of relationships and group affiliation and also helps overcome the shortage of individual mentors. Gaining the participation of retired people or elders as mentors (particularly those of the same culture as the girls) allows older people to express their natural inclination to guide the young and share their wisdom.

"One-size-fits-all" programs for girls are less effective than programs that take into account participants' needs beyond those shared by their gender.

Mentoring Young Women of Color

While girls have some needs in common, girls may have different needs related to their cultural backgrounds. According to Dr. Harriette Pipes McAdoo of Howard University, young women of color have certain experiences in common. Most will likely experience

- the world differently from white girls, regardless of their social class
- devaluation of their talents because they are from groups that have been traditionally devalued by U.S. mainstream society
- peer pressure to reject success by white standards

Continued p. 12, "Mentors"

Mentors . . . continued

- sexual exploitation, especially by older males, because of imbalanced sex ratios within their communities
- extended family relationships of kin and friends that involve a larger network of caring adults and increased responsibilities for younger children

McAdoo states that socioeconomic factors need to be separated from cultural factors to obtain a clear picture of girls' cultural strengths and their needs. If we look only at young girls of color in poverty, we may overlook the obstacles to the development of a positive self-concept that nonimpoverished girls of color encounter. For example, while middle-class African American girls often have skills that allow them to relate effectively in the dominant culture, they also experience pressure to adapt to that culture and devalue their own culture. Working-class African American girls who live in homes experiencing financial stress may have insufficient supervision, but they may also be involved in churches that provide supervision. Girls of different socioeconomic backgrounds and cultures also may react differently to the risks of forming and keeping relationships. Mentoring programs must take into account the experiences that McAdoo highlights if they wish to serve effectively the needs of all young women of color.

In developing a mentoring program for immigrant girls, practitioners must consider the process of adjusting to a new culture.

A study of 47 participants in a Hispanic mother-daughter program found that effective career role models need to talk about the cumulative nature of success, the setbacks they have encountered, and the availability of needed support by others. For Native American girls, mentoring programs that maintain cultural ties, increase awareness of career options, and involve relatives have proven beneficial.

The Influence of Family

Research shows that family and community members' support and/or involvement contributes to the educational success of girls. Good programs try to get as much parental support as possible. Mentoring programs generally provide parents or family with an orientation to the program, have them formally consent to the mentoring relationship, allow them an opportunity to disapprove of any mentor, and keep them informed of the progress of the relationship. Effective mentors are able to relate to the girls' families while not becoming embroiled in family disputes or allowing the family to control the mentoring relationship.

Some families may not encourage or support their daughters' career aspirations. For these girls, support from teachers is especially important. Including mothers in mentoring programs for Latinas may have more enduring effects on their daughter's educational and occupational ambitions than for other groups. Girls from highly patriarchal family structures will probably need special help in goal-setting, problem-solving, working-parent skills, and financial management.

Immigrant Girls

Many schools and community organizations have implemented newcomer programs to assist immigrant children with academic needs. Mentoring programs that emphasize relating to a positive adult role model of one's own group can help immigrant girls affirm their self-identities and become more comfortable in adjusting to mainstream U.S. society.

Ideally, a mentor would share the immigrant experience. Older female peers who fit this description are often effective mentors. However, if such a person is not available, an immigrant girl can still benefit greatly from having a mentor, whether an adult or peer.

In developing a mentoring program for immigrant girls, practitioners must consider the process of adjusting to a new culture. In addition to physical changes like new food and climate, or new viruses, immigrant girls

- have lost peers, familiar culture, and a sense of belonging
- may feel lonely, confused, rejected, and powerless in their new environment
- may be refugees and come from situations where they experienced violence, loss, and trauma
- face messages from the dominant culture that often conflict with or violate their home cultures

Mentoring programs, with the approval of families, can help address these issues for girls within school and community environments.

Some immigrant groups have found themselves facing hostile or less-than-accepting attitudes from some U.S. citizens. Immigrants with low economic status may experience discriminatory treatment in society and educational institutions. Programs may need to help young women address these issues, whether they are recent ar-

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From Vietnam to the U.S.

Adapted from *Women's Journeys, Women's Stories: In Search of Our Multicultural Future*

By Linda Pollack Shevitz, Maryland State Department of Education,
and Susan Morris Shaffer, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium

The following article is adapted from the curriculum Women's Journeys, Women's Stories: In Search of Our Multicultural Future, *published by the WEEA Equity Resource Center at EDC. The curriculum presents a contemporary multicultural view of U.S. history, picking up where other history texts leave off. Voices of women from a variety of backgrounds are woven into the readings and exercises.*

Journey to an Unknown Land

Before 1970, there were about 245,000 Vietnamese living in the United States. Today there are about four times as many. After the Vietnam War, Vietnamese refugees came to the United States in a series of "waves," starting with the fall of Saigon in 1975. Like the primarily diplomats, students, and teachers who had come before 1970, the first wave was composed mainly of Vietnamese who already knew quite a lot about the United States, who had learned some English while they worked with Americans during the war, and who tended to have a higher level of education. Later waves of refugees escaped from the life the Communist government attempted to impose on them. They were often separated from other family members and knew little, if any, English. Many had no American contacts, little education, and almost no personal resources.

They were making a journey into the unknown. Some of them made terrifying escapes overland through mountains or by sea in small boats. They were attacked by pirates, or were detained in overcrowded refugee camps for months, even years, waiting for clearance to make the last stage of the journey to settle in America. They left a country whose geography, customs, and history were very dear to them; they left against their will.

Many Vietnamese immigrants have encountered serious challenges in the United States. Those who arrived with limited education had greater barriers to overcome, and many Vietnamese Americans still live in poverty. Refugees who experienced traumatic and violent attacks en route to the United States may have had difficulty moving beyond terrible memories of their passages to America or the harsh environments of refugee camps where they spent prolonged periods of anxiety, even despair, and where their education was interrupted.

One irony of the Vietnamese experience in America is that many Vietnamese immigrants have gravitated to Vietnamese American communities where it would be possible to live and work with strong support systems. Many Vietnamese immigrants live in certain states, and very few live in others. This has the advantage of providing newcomers with support systems of shop owners, lawyers, doctors, and others who speak Vietnamese and know Vietnamese culture. However, it may slow the likelihood of newcomers making strides to feel more comfortable elsewhere in the United States. The following stories reflect the personal experience of Vietnamese girls and women who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1970s and 1980s.

They left a country whose geography, customs, and history were very dear to them; they left against their will.

Arriving Alone

Huong Tran Nguyen arrived all alone in the United States in 1971 when she was only seventeen years old. She had graduated from an elite French private high school in Vietnam, and she planned to continue her education in the United States. She also hoped to escape the war-torn environment of Saigon, where she had witnessed a Buddhist monk set himself on fire to protest Catholic persecution of Buddhists, and death and destruction during the 1968 Tet (New Year's) military offensive mounted by the Communist Viet Cong (North Vietnamese) soldiers against American and South Vietnamese forces. Huong Tran and her mother "had much convincing to do," since her father felt she was "too young and naive" to go to "such a faraway place." Her parents and eight siblings accompanied her to the airport.

Huong Tran made friends with a small group of Vietnamese students who also had visas prohibiting them from employment (and therefore competing with American workers) while studying. They formed a "support group" and were able to share some of the "customs, mores, traditions, views, religion, and ways of life" from home. Even with her Vietnamese friends, Huong

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"Women's Journeys" . . . continued

Tran experienced a lot of depression and nostalgia for home. She also experienced unfair treatment from some of her teachers. One told her she would have to accept the fact that, because she wasn't a native English-speaking student, she would never be able to catch up to her American-born classmates in her teacher-credentialing program. This same teacher had trouble with Huong Tran's name and said, "Why can't you change your name to something I can pronounce?" "She did not understand that my name, 'Thu Huong,' means 'Autumn Fragrance.'"

Huong Tran Nguyen became a visiting teacher at the U.S. Department of Education in the Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs in 1995. In this position she gave a classroom teacher's voice and perspective to national education activities. She was also honored as the Walt Disney Company's National Foreign Language/English as a Second Language Teacher of the Year in 1994, having taught in Orange County, California, for over eighteen years.

I want to keep my native culture, such as respecting older people, keeping family members close together, helping other people when they need help.

Education and Support

Thanh Van Anderson attributes her success in America not only to the education she earned but also to continued support from her husband and her sister; the Wilsons, an American family who acted as temporary adoptive parents to her; and her professors, colleagues, and friends. Another key person in her life is her father, who taught her "the meaning of honesty, dignity, loyalty, and persistence."

It wasn't always smooth sailing, however. Thanh encountered considerable prejudice among some of her classmates in school, who based their idea of Vietnam on stereotypes and distortions in the media and on American disillusionment with wartime events. Like Huong Tran Nguyen, she encountered resistance from a professor who felt that it was too ambitious for a first-generation immigrant to embark on a doctoral program. But Thanh decided "not [to] allow people of little minds to dictate or control my life."

Thanh Van Anderson became a classroom teacher after earning college degrees in the United States. She currently works at the Oklahoma Department of Education. She was also appointed by former United States Secretary of Education William Bennett to the National Advisory and Coordinating Council on Bilingual Education. She earned a bachelor of science degree in elementary education and a master's degree in educational administration from the University of Central Oklahoma. She went on to become a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University.

Another Perspective

Nha Nguyen left Vietnam by boat in the middle of the night in 1981, when she was 30 years old. She left because life was very difficult for her family, and she saw no future for herself or her daughter Tran.

The biggest challenge I faced when I first came to the U.S. was my English. I knew how to write and read, but I couldn't understand what people were saying or talking so it was hard for me to find a job. My father gave me the strength and support to come to the U.S. so I could build a new life for me and my child. My mother taught me to give, to help, and to be strong when there are difficulties in my life.

I want to keep my native culture, such as respecting older people, keeping family members close together, helping other people when they need help. I miss our foods, scenery, and relatives who are still back in Vietnam. The special interest I have now is to see my daughter graduate from college, to have a good job, to be treated equally, and to happily become a part of the people of the United States.

—Nha Nguyen

Bringing Daughters to a New Land

Mary Jo Thu Nguyen and her two daughters arrived in the United States in 1983, almost ten years after the end of the Vietnam War. Mary Jo had, in the preceding years, lost everything she owned. Before 1975 she had been a registered pharmacist and director of her own pharmaceutical company in Saigon, as well as a teacher at the Medical School of the University of Saigon.

Our journey to the U.S. was very interesting. My two daughters and I left Tan Son Nhut Airport of Saigon on April 7, 1983, and arrived to Panat Nikhom Refugee Camp in Bangkok in the evening of the same day. The following morning I was chosen to be the Camp Leader to interpret, translate, and explain the camp regulations to 102 refugee families as well as to manage the food distribution for them. We stayed in Panat Nikhom for seven days to get all the paperwork and immunization shots completed. As the Group Leader, I led my group to New York City safely on April 15, 1983.

I was crying the tears of joy and of homesickness. I whispered to myself, "Good-bye Saigon, Vietnam,"

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"Women's Journeys" . . . continued

and held tightly my two daughters in my arms to transfer my strength to them. I told myself, "Thu, you got to start from a big zero." My tears dried when I saw the happy smiles blooming on my daughters' faces, since every new thing was beautiful and fascinating to them. "Thank God they feel that way at the beginning of a new life in the USA," I talked to myself. Then the USCC Agent came and gave us warm clothes, and we flew to our next destination, Washington National Airport. When we landed, I saw my brother-in-law waiting at the gate to drive us home to meet my sister and my son. What a happiness to be reunited!

Mary Jo calls America "the land of opportunities" and her "second homeland, the land of full development of my three children." Nevertheless, on arriving in America she was shocked to see the increase in homeless people in the Washington, D.C., neighborhood where she had lived as a student in 1960 to 1961. Supported by her family and local government organizations, Mary Jo soon found ways to support her children. She attributes her success to a spirit of teamwork, maintaining family traditions of respect and obedience in her united family, and an ability to find positive outcomes that are compromises based on imagining others' points of view.

Mary Jo notices changes for Vietnamese women who live in America. Although some stay home and play more traditional roles of child rearing after their families achieve some economic stability, most do not. She points out that in Vietnam, men would have given their salaries to their wives to budget and spend on the family, but in America, because many Vietnamese women have fewer English-language skills than their husbands, they often are unable to play this traditional role. "In brief, the role of a female immigrant has become heavier since she has to work and also take care of the family and children."

Today, Mary Jo works two jobs she's proud of because they both serve the needs of the disadvantaged. She is a case manager, and also a registered pharmacist at a pharmacy. She had to work very hard to achieve this success, despite the fact that she was an outstanding student from an early age. Her excellence won her a leadership scholarship from Vietnam when she was very young, enabling her to study in the United States from 1960 to 1963. When she went back to Vietnam, she earned a degree in education in 1965 and another in pharmacy in 1973, from the University of Saigon. But when she arrived as a refugee in 1983, becoming recertified to practice pharmacy in the United States required that she return to school. First, however, she had to raise her children. After all three finished their medical degrees, she went back to school to earn a registered pharmacist degree in Maryland. Mary Jo is understandably proud of what her family has accomplished since "starting from big zero" in a new land.

She attributes her success to a spirit of teamwork, maintaining family traditions of respect and obedience in her united family, and an ability to find positive outcomes . . .

When she has more free time, Mary Jo hopes to write an English-language book about her experience as a Vietnamese American. When she got her American citizenship, she was "happy and proud of myself because I want to be part of this country, to cherish, to serve, and to enjoy life here for the rest of my life." Nevertheless, she hopes one day to visit Vietnam as a tourist, "when no communism exists." She wants to travel more in the United States, too. ✦

This article is adapted from the publication *Women's Journeys, Women's Stories: In Search of Our Multicultural Future* (Newton, Mass.: WEEA Equity Resource Center, 1997). For ordering information please refer to the WEEA Resources section at the top of page 9.

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rivals or come from families that have resided here for several generations.

Immigrant girls of first-generation immigrant parents may feel "caught in the middle." For example, author Gish Jen describes how her first-generation parents retained the Chinese concept about confrontation: "that's the way it is," work around problems without confronting them. And they were displeased when she started to challenge their authority—typical behavior for many American teenagers. Changing ideas about education, work, recreation, and parenting may also cause strain between immigrant children and parents.

Most importantly, effective mentors of immigrant girls must understand the complexity of the immigrant experience and the profound effect of leaving one's homeland, sometimes under dangerous conditions, for unknown demands and changes in a new country. ✦

WEEA Resources and Services

For resources and assistance call the center at 800-225-3088.

Practical Tools and Support for Gender-Fair Learning

The WEEA Equity Resource Center at EDC can help you find the tools you need to create gender-fair multicultural learning environments.

Call the center's hotline at 800-225-3088 or TTY 800-354-6798 for resources and referrals.

The center's website is full of exciting information and tools, from fun facts about the history of equality to a list of practical curricula designed to help make any subject gender-fair. The center's website was designed to be accessible to users with disabilities.

www.edc.org/WomensEquity

EDEQUITY (the Educational Equity Discussion List) is designed to support practitioners and engage them in discussion about educational theory and practice. To subscribe, send e-mail to <Majordomo@mail. edc.org>. The subject should be left blank and the body of the message should read:

subscribe edequity

The WEEA Equity Resource Center, a project of Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC), is funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Women's Educational Equity Act Program to promote gender equitable education for all students. The WEEA Center offers products, services, and referrals to schools, school boards, colleges and universities, community organizations, businesses, parents, and students throughout the country. These practical tools include curricula, books, working papers, digests, and online courses that support equity and excellence regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, class, language, and disability.

WEEA Catalog

Our catalog lists over 100 products that offer concrete ways to implement gender equitable education in classrooms, from preschool to college, and in adult education. Whether you are beginning the process or are an experienced gender equity specialist, we specialize in resources that help you understand the current issues in gender equity and how these relate to your classroom or workplace. Call the center for a free copy (800-225-3088).

Technical Assistance

We have a staff that includes a team of technical assistance specialists available to answer questions regarding issues on gender equity, disability, race, ethnicity, and class, suggest materials, make referrals, and locate speakers for conferences or activities. Contact us to ask questions.

"WEEA Resources" listed on page 9

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WEEA is the Women's Educational Equity Act: federal legislation to promote educational equity for girls and women.

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